Public Support for Economic and Military Coercion and Audience Costs[1]

ABSTRACT: I specify the role public support for economic and military coercion and reactions to executive inconsistencies play in generating and/or weakening approval for executives. In times of international crises, these factors may compete against each other when it comes to determining public approval. To examine this claim, I conducted a survey experiment on a representative sample of adults to determine when audiences will support economic or military coercion, and how this willingness to support specific coercive action affects their evaluation of the executive's handling of international crises. I find that public policy preferences can have a stronger effect than a preference for having a leader behave consistently. Specifically, I find that, (1) executive inconsistency is not punished when a leader backs down from a military commitment in a non-threatening crisis, (2) executive inconsistencies are not only punished in military disputes but also in cases of economic coercion (punishment is in fact more prominent in sanctions cases), and (3) executive inconsistency can be punished both in major and lesser conflicts.

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Western action (or lack thereof) in the current Syria crisis has been a natural laboratory of sorts for audience costs theory. Three of the world's most high profile democratic leaders have been notably inconsistent about intervening militarily, even after the Assad regime crossed what President Obama referred to as a 'red line'; employing chemical weapons outside Damascus in August of 2013. President Obama, Prime Minister Cameron, and French President Hollande clearly signaled the need to intervene, however all have failed to do so. President Obama was unsuccessful in garnering Congressional support, David Cameron's efforts failed after a 285-272 House of Commons vote on the matter, and Hollande publically backed down stating that France would not take unilateral action.

Audience cost theory has played a paramount role in the field of international relations in recent decades (Levendusky and Horowitz 2012; Downes and Sechser 2012). Audience costs refers at its core to the idea that when leaders commit to a course of military action and subsequently renege on their promise, they will suffer a 'cost' with constituents (i.e. their popularity will decline). As summed up by Chaudoin, 'a key, common assumption of audience cost theory is that audiences have preferences over *consistency*. Audiences care about whether a policymaker's actions are consistent with past promises' (Chaudoin 2014:3). Even the prospect of paying limited audience costs can affect leaders' behavior (Tarar and Leventoglu 2013). Examples include the French withdrawal of troops from Fashoda in 1898, and President Kennedy's preoccupation with allowing Khrushchev to save face during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis (Tarar and Leventoglu 2013).

In this paper, I propose a theoretical expansion of the concept of audience costs to the realm of economic coercion. This can help make sense of the recent mixed findings for audience costs theory in the military realm, as well as explain the lack of significant domestic backlash Western leaders suffered after being inconsistent regarding threats to the Assad regime. While the field's interest in the military realm is understandable, the signaling logic inherent to audience costs theory can also be extrapolated to other coercive foreign policy domains, including economic coercion. Economic sanctions are becoming increasingly common, with their use rising exponentially since World War I (Pape 1997; Drury 2001; Drezner 2003).

I specify the role public support for economic and military coercion and reactions to executive inconsistencies play in generating and/or weakening approval for executives. In times of international crises, these factors may compete against each other when it comes to determining public approval. This study constitutes the first systematic examination of which has the strongest effect. To examine this claim, I conducted a survey experiment on a representative sample of American adults to determine (a) when audiences will support economic or military coercion in crises that either threaten national security or do not pose such a threat, and (b) how this willingness to support specific coercive action affects their evaluation of the executive's handling of international crises.[1] A direct test of the effects of executive inconsistency for cases of military and economic coercion is useful for understanding national action in different types of crises, and addresses one of the theoretical lacunae of audience costs theory, which is the lack of disaggregation by type of coercive foreign policy action.

I find that public policy preferences can have a stronger effect than a preference for having a leader behave consistently. Specifically, I find that, (1) executive inconsistency is not punished when a leader backs down from a military commitment in a non-threatening crisis, (2) executive inconsistencies are not only punished in military disputes but also in cases of economic coercion (punishment is in fact more prominent in sanctions cases), and (3) executive inconsistency can be punished both in crises that pose a threat to national security as well as in crises that do not pose such a threat.

The paper proceeds as follows. I first briefly outline the central claims of audience cost theory. I then discuss the recent literature that proposes boundary conditions that limit the applicability of audience costs. I then present an alternative approach to make sense of mixed findings regarding audience costs theory: expand rather than limit the theoretical scope of audience costs.[2] The methods section describes the survey experiment I conducted with a representative sample of American adults. The results section follows. I conclude with a summary of the findings and their implications for audience costs and accountability research in international relations.

AUDIENCE COSTS AND ITS LIMITS

Audience costs literature highlights the importance of executive consistency in militarized disputes. The rationale being that, at the international level, leaders engaging in pre-war bargaining have incentives to appear highly resolved about not backing down if their claims are not met. Both strong and weak types will be motivated to signal to their opponents that they are strong; that is, that engaging in war is not excessively costly for them and that they are resolved to follow through (Fearon 1994). This

motivates leaders to commit publicly to harsh courses of action, including waging war, if their opponent does not yield. Committing publicly makes leader's threats credible because international opponents know that when a politician breaks a public promise they will pay audience costs domestically and could lose office.[3]

International relations scholars have conducted formal (Fearon 1997; Smith 1998; Guisinger and Smith 2002) and observational empirical studies[4] highlighting the beneficial positions democratic states would have relative to autocratic ones when it comes to credibly signaling resolve by making a public foreign policy commitment in an international dispute (but see Weeks 2008). Support for audience costs was found in Tomz's (2007) seminal laboratory experiment. Subsequent research has identified boundary conditions or limits to audience costs theory. Such work includes experimental studies conducted in the United Kingdom (Reifler and Scotto 2012; Davies and Johns 2013) and the United States (Trager and Vavreck 2011; Levendusky and Horowitz 2012). Trager and Vavreck emphasize the importance of executive rhetoric in determining the magnitude of audience costs. Levendusky and Horowitz (2012) also highlight the importance of domestic factors, examining the effects partisanship, partisan elites and executive justifications have on audience costs. Reifler and Scotto (2012) focus on individual-level differences and on responsiveness to new information when evaluating leaders. Davies and Johns (2013) find that perceived levels of national threat affect whether executive inconsistency is punished.

EXPANDING THE LOGIC OF AUDIENCE COSTS

Although the central focus of audience costs has been militarized conflicts, the "two-level game" signaling logic (Putnam 1998) inherent to audience costs theory can be extrapolated to other coercive foreign policy domains, including economic coercion. Imposing sanctions signals disapproval of the policies of the targeted state, and this signal can be aimed at either international or domestic audiences (Barber 1979; Daoudi and Dajani 1983; Nincic and Wallensteen 1983; Dorussen and Mo 2001; Eland 2002; Whang 2011). Popular support for economic sanctions can compel leaders to employ them, as occurred after the public outcry demanding the imposition of tougher sanctions against apartheid-era South Africa (Drury 2001, 490). Some authors have applied certain aspects of audience costs theory to the economic arena (Martin 1993; Dorussen and Mo 2001; Chaudoin 2014). On the practical front, citizens have witnessed European and American leaders threatening economic coercion directed against states that arguably do not pose enough of a direct threat to national security to garner public support for military action, such as Syria, Iran, or Russia for its alleged involvement in the Ukraine crisis.

Theoretically, expanding the logic of audience costs to the realm of economic coercion can help disentangle the effects of popular preferences for executives following through on their threats and popular support for specific coercive foreign policies. Focusing audience costs research exclusively on one policy domain confounds these two sets of public preferences. Comparing the incidence of audience costs across different types of coercion will not only further our understanding of the domestic political dynamics that accompany economic coercion. Highlighting how public preferences for

certain foreign policy responses will affect support for executives who consistently implement these policies or back down after having threatened them will help make sense of mixed findings in audience costs research.[5]

In order to more realistically examine domestic audiences' willingness to support economic and military coercion it becomes necessary to introduce varying levels of threat into the picture. Theoretically, we know that perceived levels of threat can affect audiences' willingness to support national action. Davis and Silver (2004) as well as Huddy et al. (2005) find that heightened threat levels can make domestic audiences support harsh policies they would otherwise find unacceptable.[6] This does not mean that audiences will necessarily prefer harsher policies when threat levels are heightened, as relatively less costly policies might also be considered effective. It does mean, however, that higher threat levels might reduce public concern regarding the relatively higher costs typically associated with harsher policies (including human, financial and political costs). Arguably, this is what American President Obama unsuccessfully tried to do by framing the conflict in Syria as threatening 'core interests at stake for the United States' when he had transitioned from supporting economic coercion to proposing military action (Garamone 2013).

Threat perception has also been found to affect audience costs directly. Davies and Johns (2013) compare different types of international crises, and find that, in a nuclear confrontation, an inconsistent Prime Minister was not punished. Here I wish to complement their findings by comparing crises that are similar except in that they represent varying levels of threat. It is feasible to expect that when a crisis is threatening, the public will support an executive who takes an active role and commits

to either military or economic coercion. On the other hand, we might expect that in a crisis that does not threaten national security constituents will be more discriminating about what coercive foreign policies to support and will generally tend to favor relatively less costly measures such as economic sanctions.[7] Executive inconsistency should lead to audience costs only when the unfulfilled threat was in line with what constituents were willing to support.[8]

To the best my of knowledge, this study constitutes the first systematic quantitative study to examine the connections between public support for military and economic coercion, the threat a crisis poses to national security, and leaders' actions in times of international crises. The research questions that guide this study are:

(1) Do we observe audience costs for both economic and military coercion?

(2) Does the level of national threat a crisis poses to a state moderate the effects of audience costs across policy domains?

THE EXPERIMENT

Experiments are useful tools in accountability research. First and foremost, given that political leaders strategically select their behavior in anticipation of public reactions, inferring the importance of accountability mechanisms by analyzing observational data can be problematic. As Schultz notes, 'if we can observe only the domestic costs that leaders choose to pay, then we will generally miss the cases in which these costs are large' (Schultz 2001:33). Second, studies of coercive foreign policies that examine cases

in which policies were actually implemented omit the most successful cases: the ones in which the threat alone was enough to modify the policies of another state (Drezner 2003; Lacy and Niou 2004).

Six hundred and fifty-seven American adults participated in the survey experiment in December of 2011. The study was fielded by Knowledge Networks, an online survey source used in both government and academic research. They routinely conduct web-based experiments on a probability-based panel representative of the American population. Participants are recruited from a published sample frame of residential addresses that covers approximately 98 per cent of American households.[9] Participants were randomly assigned to one of eight experimental conditions in a 2x2x2 factorial design. The experimental factors are: (a) threat posed by the international event (crisis that did not threaten national security, crisis that did pose such a threat); (b) type of foreign policy threat (economic sanctions, military intervention); and (c) executive consistency (backed down, followed through).[10]

Traditionally, theories of accountability have focused on the most dramatic form of punishment –voting a leader out of office (Anderson 2007). Recent studies have lowered this threshold. Snyder and Borghard (2011) note that a substantive decline in executive approval generated by a leader backing down from a threat can undermine political effectiveness and consequently should count as a case of audience costs. Voeten and Brewer (2006) emphasize that democratic executives require public support not only to begin a war but also to continue fighting it. As has become customary in experimental studies of audience costs,[11] I measure punishment by comparing executive approval level across experimental conditions. I measured the main dependent variable,

approval, by asking participants, '*In the crisis you just read about, do you approve of how the President acted?'* using a scale ranging from 0 (definitely disapprove) to 10 (definitely approve). Admittedly, there is no conceptual model that specifies what metric is best for measuring approval, and no consensus exists on how to best to measure it in experimental studies of audience costs (Tomz 2007 and Levy et al. 2015 use a 7-point scale; Levendusky and Horowitz 2012 use a 5-point one). I chose an 11-point scale as there is some evidence that more continuous measures provide more information than discrete Likert scales by overcoming endpoint aversion (Studer 2012). The second measure I used was the difference in executive approval after a coercive foreign policy threat was made and after the executive reneged on this threat. This variable, Δ, captures the change in approval for each individual participant.

Half of the sample read about an international crisis that posed a threat to national security in which Kazakhstan had invaded its weaker neighbor Uzbekistan. [12] Uzbekistan was described as having abundant mines of high quality uranium that could be used for developing nuclear weapons. Kazakhstan was described as having a history of supporting anti-American and anti-western terrorist groups. Participants read that a victory by the attacking country would constitute a severe threat to U.S. national security.[13] The rest of the participants read that Kazakhstan had invaded its weaker neighbor Uzbekistan. They read that if Kazakhstan's forces took over their neighbor it would pose no threat to U.S. national security.

Following these paragraphs, participants learned that the U.S. President publicly committed to impose economic sanctions on the government of Kazakhstan or to sending U.S. troops to defend the weaker country. Summary bullet points were

introduced at this stage. They stated that Kazakhstan had invaded its neighbor and described the threat posed by the crisis as well as the type of coercive foreign policy threat the executive had made. The first measure of executive approval was assessed at this stage. This initial approval measure will be used in two ways: (a) to examine what coercive policy options participants are willing to support (since it reflects support for economic or military coercion before learning about whether the executive was consistent or inconsistent), and (b) final executive approval scores will be subtracted from these initial measures in cases of inconsistency to calculate individual difference in support, or Δ.

Participants then read that Kazakhstan continued its invasion, and that the executive acted consistently and followed through on the threat or that they had backed down. A second set of summary bullet points was presented, immediately preceding the second measurement of executive approval. These bullet points indicated that Kazakhstan was continuing to invade its neighbor, described the threat posed by the crisis, the type of coercive foreign policy threat the executive had made, as well as whether this threat had been implemented. Participants read that the conflict was ongoing in order to avoid contaminating approval resulting from executive action in a crisis with any satisfaction/dissatisfaction that could potentially emerge from an American foreign policy action being successful/unsuccessful (Gelpi, Feaver and Reifler 2005).

RESULTS

Before discussing the results, there are two preliminary points I wish to address. First, I follow Levendusky and Horowitz's (2012) lead and ensure that randomization truly took place. A multinomial logistic regression was run to check whether demographic characteristics and political affiliation predicted the assignment of participants to experimental conditions. The results support the notion that randomization effectively occurred and the different values obtained for the dependent variables are causally linked to the experimental factors. Second, the study rests on the assumption that people are willing to support economic and military coercion because they consider them to be effective measures in times of crisis. I find that this assumption holds. [14]

Before presenting the subsequent regression analyses, I will briefly describe executive approval. Figure 1 provides a general overview of how the experimental factors affect executive approval.[15] The grey bar in Figure 1 represents average approval across all conditions, and can be considered a measure of baseline approval. The bars with solid lines represent cases in which executives consistently implemented their threats; bars with dashed lines represent inconsistent cases. Bars with vertical lines represent high threat scenarios, whereas bars with horizontal lines represent crises that did not pose a threat to national security.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

A number of trends can be observed in Figure 1. First, the left-hand side of the figure suggests that in threatening crises executive approval when a leader follows

through on a military threat or a threat to impose sanctions is practically indistinguishable (71 per cent and 73 per cent respectfully). However, in a low threat crisis, executive approval will be higher for imposing sanctions (71 per cent) than for intervening militarily (50 per cent -the lowest rating for any consistent President). Second, the right-hand side of the figure shows that approval rates for inconsistent executives are generally lower than those of consistent counterparts. Executive approval is particularly low when the President reneges in cases of economic coercion, in both threatening (36 per cent) and non-threatening crises (40 per cent). Although these figures are merely descriptive statistics, they suggest that audience costs might play a role in economic coercion; examining the statistical analyses below will help us understand the rationale behind these patterns.

(1) Do we Observe Audience Costs For Both Economic and Military Coercion?

To assess whether approval for consistent executives is higher than approval for inconsistent ones, an OLS regression was conducted.[16] Table 1 suggests that *Executive Consistency* has a significant effect on approval, as executives who publically commit to a course of coercive foreign policy and subsequently renege have lower approval levels. That is, inconsistent executives are punished for backing down after issuing economic or military threats in both threatening and non-threatening crises. Audience costs can be observed in cases of economic sanctions as well as in cases of military intervention.

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

The interaction between *Foreign Policy Threat* and *Executive Consistency* is also significant. An analysis of the marginal effects of the independent variables on executive approval (Brambor, Clark and Golder 2006) shows that executive inconsistency is punished more severely in cases of economic coercion than in militarized disputes. In these cases the difference in approval for consistent Presidents (M=7.20) and for those that renege on sanctions (M=3.80) more than doubles the difference between consistent (M=6.04) and inconsistent leaders (M=4.82) in cases of military coercion. Not only do audience costs operate in cases of economic coercion, but the potential loss in executive approval following inconsistency is even steeper than when the President reneges on military threats.

It is feasible that the lower the execution costs associated with a coercive foreign policy are, the higher the domestic political costs will be for reneging. Reneging after committing to a foreign policy that will be costly in terms of lives and treasure can be perceived as having a positive effect, as these costs will be avoided. However, reneging after threatening the imposition of sanctions, which is relatively less costly than military action, is not accompanied by this positive externality. As we will see in the following section, I find that people generally tend to support the imposition of sanctions more so than military intervention. In this sense this interaction supports the notion that constituents will punish executive inconsistency considering whether the action the executive failed to enact is something they wanted to see implemented in the first place.[17]

These results suggest that the monotonic trend Tomz (2007) finds between level of escalation and degree of audience costs might actually be curvilinear. Tomz compared 4 different levels of escalation (threat of force, display of force, use of force without US casualties, and use of force with US casualties) and finds that although audience costs do not increase smoothly with each level of escalation, a monotonic trend is observable because audience costs generally tend to increase with escalation. Here I find that whereas the risk of paying audience costs increases when executives escalate policies pertaining to the military domain, they also increase when the executive threatens the implementation of economic sanctions (compared to a military threat). It remains to be seen whether different levels of escalation in the economic coercion spectrum impact the effect backing down has on executive approval. Public support for a given coercive foreign policy might interact with reputational concerns associated with backing down after coercive foreign policies have escalated beyond a threat or display level.

(2) DOES THE LEVEL OF NATIONAL THREAT A CRISIS POSES TO A STATE MODERATE THE EFFECTS OF AUDIENCE COSTS ACROSS POLICY DOMAINS?

To answer this question we should first examine whether the public's willingness to support economic or military coercion varies according to the threat posed by an international crisis. This will allow us to learn more about what coercive policy options the public prefers to be considered when national security is (and isn't) at stake. We will then see if these public preferences moderate whether audience costs are paid (when the executive subsequently backs down on the threat that was initially made). The first step

was therefore conducting a regression with the first measure of executive approval (before participants learned whether the executive acted consistently or inconsistently).

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Table 2 shows that *Foreign Policy Threat* has a significant effect on domestic support for the executive in times of international conflict.[18] Domestic audiences are generally more likely to support the use of economic sanctions than of military force. This reflects a broader lack of support for 'boots on ground' that has become relatively commonplace among Western audiences.[19]

Table 2 also suggests a significant interaction between *Threat of Crisis* and *Foreign Policy Threat*. Although the use of economic coercion is generally more supported than military coercion, this is particularly the case in a non-threatening crisis. A marginal effects analysis suggests that the difference in support for economic and military coercion is almost tripled in a non-threatening crisis compared to in a threatening one (M=7.42 for economic coercion in a high threat crisis and M=6.83 for military coercion; M=7.0 for economic coercion in a low threat crisis and M=5.2 for military coercion). When national security is at stake, citizens will generally support a President who actively engages in coercive foreign policies, be it economic or military coercion. However, when a crisis does not pose a threat to national security, constituents are significantly less likely to support costlier policies such as military intervention.

[FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

The second step to answer the research question above involves examining the three-way interaction between *Threat of Crisis*, *Foreign Policy Threat*, and *Executive Consistency* (Brambor, Clark and Golder 2006) presented in Table 1. This interaction indicates that public preferences for the use of economic or military action (given the threat of a crisis) indeed moderate the degree to which executive inconsistency is punished. An analysis of the marginal effects of the independent variables on executive approval suggests that consistently implementing either economic or military coercion is rewarded when national security is at stake. In threatening crises approval for executives who consistently enact military or economic coercion is high. The highest mean for executive approval is for presidents who consistently enact economic sanctions in threatening crises (M=7.28). The mean for military coercion is somewhat lower than that of economic coercion (M=7.10), but remains high. Imposing economic sanctions might provide the executive with enough popular support in times of conflict, even when national security is threatened. Both military action and imposing economic sanctions are considered effective responses in times of international crises that threaten national security. Consequently, executive inconsistency is punished for both military (M=4.52) and economic coercion (M=3.57) in such cases.

Figure 2 above shows that executive inconsistency will not always be punished. When national security is not at stake, audience costs following inconsistent behavior are paid in the economic realm but not in the military domain. In crises that are not threatening executive approval is high after sanctions are implemented (M=7.13), whereas executives who commit to imposing sanctions and subsequently renege lose

support (M= 4.02). On the other hand, when an executive threatens troop deployment in a crisis that does not pose a direct threat to national security and subsequently backs down, approval will be slightly higher (M=5.12) than it would have been had they followed through on the threat (M=4.99). There is no reward for following through on threats for military action when domestic audiences were not initially supportive in relatively low stakes settings.

INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL COSTS OF EXECUTIVE INCONSISTENCY

Here I take the analysis a step further and examine individual-level dynamics. The percentages in Table 3 are the result of subtracting each participant's approval for the executive after they back down to the approval awarded after the initial threat to impose sanctions or to intervene militarily was made. Table 3 is quite straightforward. As Tomz stated, in experiments, 'one can obtain unbiased estimates of the treatment effects via cross-tabulation' (Tomz 2007, 826).

[TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

Three main patterns can be observed in Table 3. First, in a threatening crisis the percentage of participants who withdraw support following inconsistency is higher (71 per cent in cases of military coercion; 62 per cent for economic coercion) than in non-threatening ones (64 per cent and 44 per cent respectfully). While Table 3 does not compare consistent and inconsistent cases and can therefore not be used to compare

public reactions following consistent and inconsistent action, the percentages above lend some support to the idea that inconsistency following either military or economic coercion will be punished in threatening crises. Second, in non-threatening crises, punishment following executive inconsistency in cases of economic coercion (64 per cent) is higher than for military coercion (44 per cent). This suggests that supporting executives who back down from a threat to impose economic sanctions in non-threatening crises also operates at an individual level.

However, the most interesting aspect of Table 3 is probably observed in the row for military coercion in non-threatening crises. We can observe that the percentage of participants who punish inconsistency (44 per cent) is practically indistinguishable from the percentage of individuals whose approval for the executive *increases* after they back down (41 per cent). This suggests that audiences might not punish executives who are inconsistent following a military threat in a crisis that does not threaten national security. Although there seems to be a substantial percentage of individuals who are relieved when military action is not followed through (even in threatening crises we can see that executive approval increases for 26 per cent of participants when the executive backs down on a military threat), in this case it is so high that inconsistency isn't actually punished at all.

CONCLUSION

When leaders act in ways that do not reflect the opinions of those they represent, constituents can punish them and potentially vote them out of office (Anderson 2007). Even if constituents do not have specific knowledge of foreign affairs, they do have

general ideas about what national action they would support when an international crisis breaks out. The public might not fully comprehend specific foreign policy options such as what constituted a 'no fly zone' in Libya, however, –as exemplified in the current Syria crisis, or with widespread concern regarding Iran's enrichment of uranium– citizens do have opinions about whether we should be pursuing some sort of coercive action. Whether the executive acts in accordance to these opinions will affect the levels of domestic approval they will have in times of international conflict. Had David Cameron implemented the military threats made against the Assad regime is it far-fetched to envision some degree of domestic backlash?

When an international crisis poses a threat to national security, the public will approve of executives who intervene militarily or impose economic sanctions because they are willing to support both policy options. When a crisis does not pose such a threat, domestic audiences will only support economic coercion, and thus economic threats will receive higher levels of public approval. Not only do I find that executive inconsistency is punished in cases of economic coercion: inconsistent executives pay *higher* costs when reneging on the promise of economic sanctions than after backing down on military threats. It remains to be seen whether the curvilinear relationship between escalation of commitment and increasing magnitude of audience costs suggested here applies to different types of executive commitment to economic coercion.

By focusing on the interaction between what policies constituents are willing to support and the actions of democratic leaders in times of international conflict, this study helps bring together two strands of accountability theory in international relations.

The first; principle-agent theory that emphasizes how citizens hold leaders accountable when they do not represent their substantive policy preferences –and how these public preferences can foment or constrain the initiation of warfare (Bueno de Mesquita & Siverson 1995; Bueno de Mesquita, Morrow, Siverson & Smith 1999). The second; theories of audience costs that emphasize whether leaders act consistently between what they promise they will do and the foreign policies they actually implement. Establishing connections between these areas of research allows us to expand the applicability of the concept of audience costs to cases that go beyond the original scope outlined by Fearon in 1994. It remains to be seen if the concept of audience costs can be expanded to other areas of statecraft beyond militarized and economic coercion.

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Table 1: Effects of Threat of Crises, Foreign Policy Threat, and Executive Consistency on Executive Approval

		Model With Controls
Threat of Crisis	-0.457 (0.474)	-0.489 (0.465)
Foreign Policy Threat	1.093** (0.487)	0.982** (0.476)
Executive Consistency	3.107*** (0.472)	2.941*** (0.465)
Threat of Crisis* Foreign Policy Threat	-0.141 (0.682)	-0.093 (0.670)
Threat of Crisis* Executive Consistency	0.607 (0.682)	0.783 (0.672)
Foreign Policy Threat* Executive Consistency	-3.235*** (0.679)	-3.018*** (0.667)
Threat of Crisis*Foreign Policy Threat* Executive Consistency	2.100** (0.961)	1.874** (0.946)
Political Affiliation		0.323*** (0.564)
Age		0.140* (0.007)
Education		-0.132* (0.068)
Gender		-0.076 (0.239)
Income		0.039 (0.031)
Current Employment		-0.048 (0.060)
Constant	4.023*** (0.323)	3.220*** (0.902)
N	639	634

Robust standard errors in parentheses, *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Table 2: Effects of Threat of Crises and Foreign Policy Threat on Executive Approval

Effects of Threat of Crises and Foreign Policy Threat on Executive Approval

		Model With Controls
Threat of Crisis	0.430	0.446
	(0.317)	(0.317)
Foreign Policy Threat	-1.802***	-1.810***
	(0.314)	(0.313)
Threat of Crisis*Foreign Policy Threat	1.210***	1.206***
	(0.445)	(0.446)
Political Affiliation		0.150***
		(0.053)
Age		-0.003
		(0.007)
Education		0.056
		(0.064)
Gender		0.156
		(0.225)
Income		0.047
		(0.029)
Current Employment		-0.027
		(0.057)
Constant	6.99***	5.230***
	(0.219)	(0.841)
N	639	634

Robust standard errors in parentheses, *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1.

Table 3: Individual-level differences in Presidential Evaluation Following Executive Inconsistency

		Individuals whose approval decreased	Individuals whose approval did not change	Individuals whose approval increased	
Threatening crisis	Difference in economic coercion	71%	22%	7%	100%
	Difference in military coercion	62%	12%	26%	100%
Non-threatening crisis	Difference in economic coercion	64%	18%	18%	100%
	Difference in military coercion	44%	14%	41%	100%

The differences presented in the upper section of the table (for threatening crises) are statistically significant with a Pearson chi2 of 12.0625 (pr=0.002). The differences presented in the lower section of the table (for non-threatening crises) are statistically significant with a Pearson chi2 of 9.6837 (pr=0.008).

Figure 1: Executive Approval across Conditions

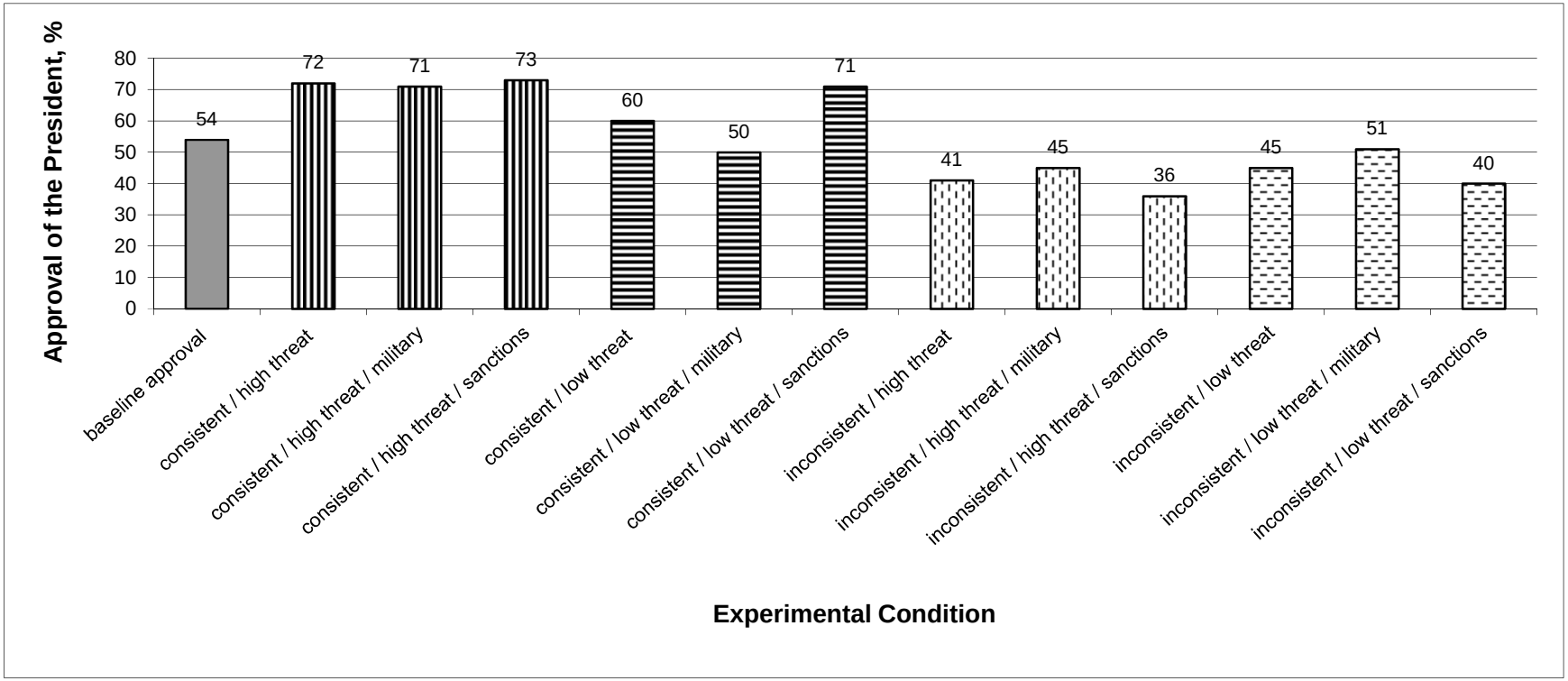
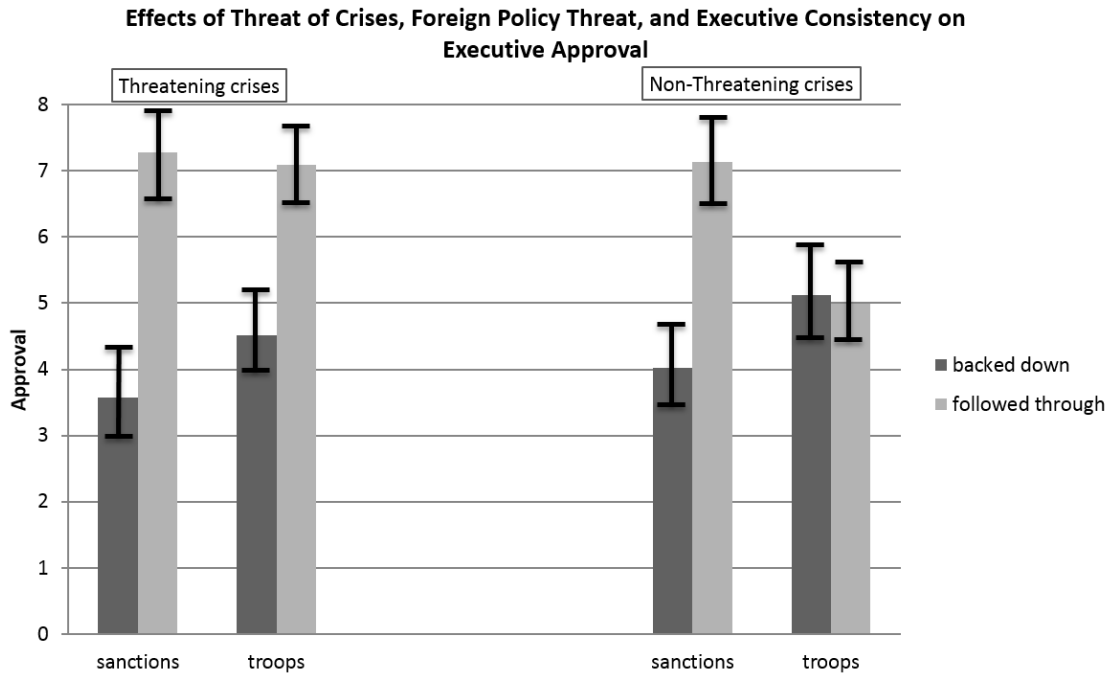


Figure 2:


Effects of Threat of Crises, Foreign Policy Threat, and Executive Consistency on Executive Approval
Threatening crises
Non-Threatening crises
Approval
0
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
sanctions
troops
sanctions
troops
backed down
followed through

[1]Support for this research was provided by the National Science Foundation. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.

[2] Levy et al (2015) have also explored expanding the applicability of audience costs theory. Specifically, they examine whether the public disapproves of executives who commit to staying out of a conflict and subsequently intervene.

[3]This core notion of audience costs was originally formulated by Fearon (1994). As a simplified model of international interactions, it does not address alternate incentives such as not wanting to appear as resolved to follow through as that might make an opponent feel they have no option but to attack.

[4] Gaubatz 1996; Partell and Palmer 1999; Schultz 1999, 2001; Gelpi and Griesdorf 2001; Eyerman and Hart 1996.

[5] Snyder and Borghard claim that audience costs are rare among other things because audiences are more concerned about 'policy substance than about consistency between the leader's words and deeds. Where these criteria are in conflict, punishment is more likely to be doled out for an unpopular policy than for a failure to carry out a threat (Snyder and Borghard 2011:455). Similarly, Chaudoin (2014) finds that, in cases of international trade, preferences over policy can indeed outweigh the importance of preferences for consistent executives.

[6] That is, the preferences of agents could change under higher perceived threat levels if one adopts a principal-agent framework.

[7]I assume that at an aggregate level these are the preferences of domestic audiences. This does not imply that every individual citizen will have these preferences. See Trager and Vavreck 2011 for an analysis of the effects of individual level variation between 'hawks' and 'doves' on audience costs or Reifler and Scotto 2012 for a UK-US cross-national analysis.

[8] Trachtenberg notes that there is at least one clear historical case in which domestic audiences would have punished their governments for *not* backing down on a threat. Given the general reluctance of Europeans to risk going to war, if the French and the British governments would have followed through on threats to take action against Germany if Hitler remilitarized the Rhineland in March of 1936, they would have probably lost upcoming elections (Trachtenberg 2012:47).

[9]To ensure the internal validity of the experiment I pre-tested different versions of the instrument in pilot studies conducted with American and British convenience samples (between November of 2010 and November of 2011). The objective was to ensure that the differences between threatening and non-threatening crises, economic and military coercion, and consistent and inconsistent executive action were clear to participants, thereby ensuring that the experiment was measuring what it is intended to measure. Though the essence of the experiment was the same, I varied the context slightly to achieve the highest experimental validity by making the scenarios comparable to content participants might encounter in real life. Manipulation checks included in these pre-tests unequivocally show that the independent variables were

clearly understood by participants as I intended them to be (that is, the manipulation checks show that the three independent variables work as expected).

[10]The first values were coded as 0, the latter as 1.

[11] Tomz 2007; Trager and Vavreck 2011; Scotto and Reifler 2012; Levendusky and Horowitz 2012; Davies and Johns 2013.

[12]My design differs from Tomz's (2007) seminal study, in that I don't include a condition where the President commits to staying out. My main interest is to compare cases where the executive makes a military threat to those in which he threatens sanctions and assess the implications of this comparison for audience costs theory; not to directly test the existence of the audience costs mechanism as previously confirmed by various prominent studies. However, I ran a supplemental experiment with a sample of 360 students that directly compares scenarios of economic and military coercion to a scenario in which the executive commits to staying out. Executive approval was significantly lower in these situations (M=3.15 when staying silent in threatening crises and M=4.95 in non-threatening ones on an 11-point scale, compared to M=7.01 when the President engages in economic coercion, and M=6.42 when he makes a military threat is made). Another significant departure from Tomz's seminal experimental design is the inclusion of the Δ measure. Full text of scenarios in Appendix.

[13] National security can be defined in many different ways. Leaders and political elites can influence media frames in an attempt to draw popular support for their policy objectives (Robinson 2000; Entman 2003; Kull, Ramsay and Lewis 2004; Berinsky and Kinder 2006; Boettcher and Cobb 2009; Perla 2011). Questions of how individuals determine whether a crisis is threatening do not pertain to this study. Here I focus instead on whether the public will support the executive disapprove of his performance in the context of a crisis presented to them by the executive as threatening (or not) to national security.

[14]Please see Appendix for both tests.

[15]Given that the purpose of Figure 1 is to compare approval across all scenarios, the bars correspond to responses to the second approval measure in the experiment (after the executive acted consistently or inconsistently).

[16]Analysis conducted with the second approval measure. Although experiments do not typically require control variables, Table 1 includes political affiliation and key demographic characteristics. First, we can see that the inclusion of political affiliation and of demographic variables does not significantly alter the effects the independent variables have on executive approval. That is, the theoretical factors identified in the paper (threat of a crisis, type of coercive foreign policy threat, and executive inconsistency) significantly affect executive approval while controlling for political affiliation and the set of key demographic variables commonly found to affect voting behaviour. Second, the multinomial logistic regression conducted to ensure that participants were randomly assigned to the different experimental scenarios shows that democrats and republicans were evenly distributed across conditions (as was generally the case for demographic variables – with the exception of age in the fifth experimental condition). Third, although participants know they are

being exposed to hypothetical scenarios, three control variables had statistically significant effects on approval: (a) political affiliation: democrats tend to approve of the executive more than republicans; (b) age: older participants tend to approve more than younger counterparts; and (c) education: less educated participants tend to approve more than participants with higher education.

[17]Higher initial approval ratings in cases of economic coercion imply a higher potential for loss of approval after reneging (relative to cases of military coercion, where initial support for military action is lower).

[18]As was the in previous analyses, here too the inclusion of control variables does not significantly alter the effects of the experimental factors on the dependent measure. Political affiliation again has a statistically significant effect on approval, as democrats tend to approve of the executive more than republicans do.

[19]An August 30th-September 1st 2014 The Economist/YouGov poll suggests that 45 per cent of respondents think the United States should 'impose greater economic sanctions on Russia' compared to only 9 per cent who favors 'sending U.S. troops to Ukraine.' Regarding the current IS/ISIS crisis in Iraq, the same poll shows that 4 per cent favor 'sending ground troops to fight for the Iraqis,' 12 per cent support the notion of 'sending ground troops to fight with the Iraqis,' and 11 per cent thinks the United States should 'send ground troops to fight against Islamist militants in Syria' (given the nature of the crisis, respondents were not asked about their preferences regarding the use of economic coercion).